Negotiating the CCA / CCGN Kerfuffle

December 2nd, 2016by Lance Ralston

Pastor Chuck Smith frequently referred to Ephesians 4 as a transformative passage for his ministry. He'd served for seventeen years as a pastor in a denomination where pastors were urged to be evangelists. After reading Ephesians 4:11-12, Chuck understood his role as a pastor needed to "equip the saints" which was best done by faithfully expositing the Word of God. Pastor Chuck's application of that became the central theme around which Calvary Chapel grew. As he was fond of saying by way of a motto for our movement, "Simply teach the Bible, simply."

Hang on to that; we'll come back to it later.

Here we are, barely three years after Pastor Chuck's passing, and the movement has fractured in two, I won't say "competing", but disparate groups; *Calvary Chapel Association* and *Calvary Chapel Global Network*. For brevity's sake, we use the acronyms CCA and CCGN. Although neither group has at this stage required local Calvary Chapel churches to declare allegiance, the tone of the split between the two groups hints such may be in the offing.

So, as the pastor of CC Oxnard, I own a responsibility to make clear my view of what's happened and where I stand. Leaders must speak with a clear, not uncertain voice. I trust what follows brings clarity and calms any unrest in the flock, not only at Calvary Oxnard, but among members of other Calvary Chapels looking for guidance at this time.

First a little history . . .

Long before Pastor Chuck passed, he established a board of men to administer the wider Calvary Chapel movement. Their task was basically two-fold; 1) Oversee the affiliation of new fellowships, 2) Plan and stage the annual movement-wide pastor's conference. This group was called the *Calvary Chapel Association* and was comprised of long-time pastors of the larger fellowships around the Country. These men functioned as regional overseers; pastors to pastors, communication and coordination leaders to local Calvarys in their area. Each was responsible to

ensure church plants and affiliated fellowships in their region were committed to the movement's "distinctives."

The main or central CCA council is *currently* comprised of fifteen men. Most of these have in turn recruited a few regional assistants who help them in the administration of their area. Since its inception, the central council met regularly for prayers and counsel. Because of the busy schedules of these pastors, at any given meeting, there were guys who couldn't make it. And, as is to be expected, in a group that size, all of them being strong leaders, the tenor and tone of their relationships were not universally warm and affectionate. Some men were closer than others. And in some cases, past differences marked some relationships with tension. Until recently, that tension was subsumed under a sense of the need to set inter-personal differences aside for the sake of the movement.

Then, in a sequences of events that are best left unspecified, the inter-personal conflict emerged to cause of rift among the men who comprise CCA. The who and what of all that is not appropriate for public discussion or analysis. What is, is what *they* have made public by their own actions.

I need to back up in time a bit. Brian Brodersen had been Pastor Chuck's assistant pastor at Calvary Costa Mesa for several years. When Chuck Smith died, the Board of CCCM asked Brian to be the new lead pastor. As the flagship church of the Calvary Chapel movement, Brian's influence was substantial. But the pastors of the many Calvary Chapel churches understood that Pastor Chuck

intended CCA

to be the ostensible lead for the movement as a whole. Brian was a member of CCA.

Over the last few months, events conspired to widen old gaps between some of the men in CCA. As a result, Brian resigned. That might have been the end of it all, were it not for the out-sized influence Calvary Costa Mesa holds in our movement. While CCA is the body through which official affiliation is done, CCCM hosts the main internet presence for the movement via calvarychapel.com. That is the site most people use to find a local Calvary Chapel church when they move or are visiting a new area. Many CC pastors and leaders in the movement write excellent articles on the Christian Faith and Life that are posted on calvarychapel.com, read by thousands all over the world. Many of the hard assets associated with the Calvary Chapel movement are owned by CCCM, and fall under the purview of

Pastor Brian.

An internal email was sent to local Calvary pastors on November 2nd by CCA dealing with some “housekeeping” issues. A few days later, Pastor Brian posted a public notice of his resignation from CCA and his formation of *another* group called Calvary Chapel Global Network.

Then, on November 28th, CCA gave a formal response acknowledging the breach between CCA and CCGN. (See that announcement here; scroll down to the heading “11.28.2016 : Letter to the Movement”)

What all this means for us at Calvary Oxnard . . .

Very little. As I mentioned earlier, *at this point,* neither CCA nor CCGN is requiring me as a CC pastor or our church to “take a side.” That’s good because I’m not inclined to do so. I honor and respect both sides. My loyalty lies with CCA as I’m one of our regional pastor’s (David Guzik, Lead Pastor at Calvary Chapel Santa Barbara) assistants. I also hold tremendous respect for the other men who comprise the main CCA council. But I also love and respect Pastor Brian Brodersen. He’s done what I regard to be a masterful job of stepping into the role of lead pastor at Costa Mesa. No one could “fill Pastor Chuck’s shoes.” Brian has made his own pair and wears them admirably.

I love all these men, and genuinely like the ones I’ve met, which is most of them. It grieves me they’ve fallen out with each other.

So, we’ll keep doing what we’ve done for over 30 years at CCO. We are a Calvary Chapel through and through. We continue on as members in good standing with CCA, and as Pastor Brian has graciously offered, we’re “grandfathered” in to the new CCGN. We’re a part of both groups; and will remain so as long as neither requires us to take a side.

Here’s my appeal to both CCA and CCGN: Please guys, don’t make me choose sides.

A Last Word . . .

I end by recalling where we started; with Ephesians 4 and the role it played in catapulting Chuck Smith to become the pastor, not just of a local church, but a vast movement. What the Apostle Paul says earlier in that chapter is good for Pastor Chuck’s spiritual heirs at this time.

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:1–3

Here we are, barely 3 years after Pastor Chuck's departure, and the movement has already fractured. And over what? There's no issue of substance that's resulted in this fracture; no dear doctrinal departure. The rift has come over personal conflicts and an inability to show grace and a willingness to subsume personal hurt to the far great imperatives of the Gospel and God's Kingdom.

Where have both sides in this done what Paul calls for in Ephesians 4? Where have these men *"with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, born with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?"*

I'm sure the men at the heart of this all have what they consider "very good reasons" for what they've done, for the emails they've sent, and posts they've made. While I'm privy to neither details nor specifics, I can say with all certainty, the results of your actions far out-weight the causes.

How different might all of this have been had there been a simple repentance from pride and a simple apology?

I hope and pray this lesson won't be lost on myself and those I serve with here at CCO.

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